

In the past 15 years we at graveneyhenshaw have been working with managers in training programmes, workshops and 1:1. In this series of regular articles we answer Frequently Asked Questions – the questions managers ask us most often – and use these to outline a range of solutions to the key issues facing managers today.

In our first article we began to address the 'why' of performance management by answering the FAQ 'What is the point in managing people's performance?' We explored the benefits of effective performance management to the manager, the staff member and the organisation. We discuss these same issues with managers during our training programmes and the response we get most often is 'yes you're right, we should be effectively managing people's performance - it's common sense isn't it?' Yes - it is. However our experience tells us that even in organisations with highly sophisticated management and appraisal systems, effective performance management does make sense but it's certainly not *common*.

## THE INTELLECTUAL VERSUS THE PRACTICAL

Many managers embrace the power of effective performance management on an intellectual level, yet many also tell us they have real difficulty in applying performance management processes in the work place. In this article we seek to answer some of the questions and explore some of the beliefs that we feel underpin these difficulties - in other words 'Yes I know it makes sense to manage people's performance but why me?'

## WHAT MANAGERS SAY ABOUT MANAGING (OR NOT MANAGING) PEOPLE'S PERFORMANCE

*'I feel embarrassed about setting standards for my staff, some of them are more experienced than I am – who am I to say what good performance in their job looks like?'*

*'Won't my staff feel patronised if I monitor their performance – won't they think I don't trust them?'*

*'I get on really well with my staff, we are all friends. I feel really embarrassed when I have to act 'managerial.''*

*'I know I really should deal with my staff member's performance problem, but I'm sure they will feel angry / upset / disappointed and I don't want to deal with that.'*

*'I know performance management makes sense –but I don't really do it now and my manager doesn't seem to mind or care as long as I put something on the appraisal form'*

Frequently the managers we work with seem to feel the need to gain permission to undertake probably the most important part of their role – managing people’s performance. They often tell us they lack confidence in their ability to behave in a managerial way with credibility, and they also question the validity of dedicating time and energy to an activity that seems to be little valued in their business.

*So what’s the answer?*

## WHEN PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT WORKS IN PRACTICE

Our experience is that managers fully embrace and implement effective performance management processes when:

- They fully understand its purpose
- They fully understand and believe in their right to manage people’s performance
- They have a clear understanding of their responsibilities as performance managers and these responsibilities are defined with them as performance standards
- They are given support, guidance and training in developing the necessary skills
- They are acknowledged and rewarded for effective performance management.

Let’s explore these issues in more detail.

**“Most managers spend little time thinking about *their* rights as managers of people’s performance”**

## THE MANAGER’S RIGHT TO MANAGE

Employee’s rights at work are a well debated and largely well understood concept. Most managers have some understanding of the organisation’s legal duty of care to employees. And rightly so. Most managers, however, spend little time thinking about *their* ‘rights’ as managers of people’s performance. Here are some of the rights we believe managers must have:

### The manager’s rights

- To set and agree standards of performance for the job – both quantifiable standards and behavioural standards
- To expect their staff to consistently meet the agreed standards for the job
- To devise and implement a range of monitoring methods intended to gather samples of actual performance against the standards
- To hold performance reviews in which they give focussed, specific feedback on performance – the positive and negative aspects
- To identify areas of under performance and to address those areas of under performance with their staff member
- To expect the staff member to take agreed actions to improve their areas of under performance.

Our experience is that managers need a full understanding and appreciation of these rights in order to build their confidence managing their staff’s performance. But it is not the whole picture.

## MANAGING THE MANAGER

The level of support and encouragement that managers receive from *their* line manager is key to building this confidence – it will also help to overcome the reluctance to apply performance management processes in practice. Underpinning this support and encouragement is *clarity* – the individual's understanding of the expectations *their* manager has of them in their role as performance managers. We have literally lost count of the number of managers we have met that have no agreed performance standards of their own relating to performance management.

Consider this question - how can organisations expect their managers to undertake the complex work of managing their staff's performance if:

1. The manager does not know what effective performance looks like in practice in their organisation.
2. The manager is not held accountable for the effective performance management of their staff – it is not seen as an integral part of their job but something to be done when all of the 'real work' has been completed.
3. They are not acknowledged or rewarded for effective performance management?

*We don't think they can.*

### Performance Standards for Performance Managers

Here are some examples of performance standards we have helped organisations develop for their managers:

- To agree clear performance standards with your staff which define satisfactory performance for the job
- To agree and implement a range of monitoring methods designed to assess actual performance against the performance standards
- To undertake performance review sessions with each member of your staff on a quarterly basis during which you:
  - \* Provide feedback on performance supported by objective evidence
  - \* Identify and agree areas for development
  - \* Invite feedback on your management skills and style
  - \* Discuss the staff member's satisfaction and agree any areas for improvement
- To undertake an annual appraisal in line with the organisation's appraisal scheme in which your ratings of the staff member's performance are clearly supported by objective evidence

**"We have literally lost count of the number of managers we have met that have no agreed performance standards of their own relating to performance management"**

- To identify any areas of under performance, to gain agreement from the staff member to improvement in performance, and to agree an action plan designed to improve the staff member's performance in line with the performance standards
- To ensure that any feedback from your staff members on your management of their performance is positive.

## SUPPORTING AND TRAINING THE MANAGER

Of course defining performance standards is only the beginning of the process. Managers need support, training and guidance in how to achieve their own standards – to help them develop into fully effective performance managers.

## AND NOT FORGETTING

### The Staff Member's Rights

In our training programmes we often ask the question 'What do you, as an employee, want from your manager?' Here are some typical answers:

Clarity/feedback/recognition/communication/learning/praise/assistance/advice/support/responsibility/challenge/clear direction/incentives.

We know that within the context of performance management, the staff member also has rights. In very simple terms they have the right to be effectively managed. We also know people derive satisfaction from being effectively managed, along with achieving improved performance.

**"Managers need support, training and guidance in how to achieve their own standards—to help them develop into fully effective performance managers"**

## AND FINALLY

In this second article we have continued our exploration of some of the key issues around the 'why' of performance management. We believe that effective performance management is crucial to the success of organisations and to the happiness of the people who work in those organisations. We feel passionately about the power of effective performance management. In subsequent articles we will concentrate on the 'how' of performance management.

We hope you have enjoyed reading this article. Please feel free to copy it to anyone you think would find it interesting. If you would like to discuss this article, to pose your own questions or to explore how we could help you make these ideas come alive in your organisation we would be delighted to hear from you.

## graveneyhenshaw

graveneyhenshaw is a training consultancy that works with a diverse range of clients in both the private and public sectors in the UK. They help individuals, groups and teams learn how to become more effective, how to maximise their potential and how to learn. They add value to their client organisations by tying personal learning to business goals.

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